

ICE AGE NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

Corridor Plan and Environmental Assessment
For Marathon County, Wisconsin



Prepared by:

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**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document analyzes alternatives for locating and developing the Ice Age National Scenic Trail (NST) through Marathon County in Wisconsin and proposes implementation of the “Preferred” alternative.

On October 3, 1980, an amendment to the National Trails System (16 U.S.C. 1241 et seq.) authorized establishment of the Ice Age Trail as a National Scenic Trail (NST). To date, Congress has authorized the establishment of eight NSTs—“extended trails so located as to provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, or cultural qualities of the areas through which such trails may pass.” These trails are patterned after the renowned Appalachian NST. NSTs are intended to provide superlative experiences compared to other trails.

Congress only authorized a general route for the trail. The National Park Service (NPS) and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) are coordinating and facilitating the planning process to determine a more specific route for the trail in each county or multi-county area. A planning team was formed to evaluate corridor and possible trail route options and conduct a public involvement process in Marathon County.

The proposal is to establish a planned and mapped “Corridor of Opportunity” within which lands for the trail may be acquired, developed, managed, and protected for the Marathon County portion of the Ice Age NST. This would help guide agencies and private volunteer organizations in their efforts to secure a route for the trail. The Corridor of Opportunity is approximately 3-6 miles wide. Since all participation in the Ice Age NST is voluntary, this width allows flexibility when locating the trail. A decision to not adopt the preferred alternative would limit some Federal participation in this County, but it would not preclude the work continuing as described under the No-Action Alternative. Each segment of trail will be developed as funds and approvals allow. The goal, however, is a continuous completed trail.

The Marathon County portion of the Ice Age NST contains a diversity of uplands and lowlands and generally follows the undulating terrain of the Hancock, Almond and Elderon moraines. Other glacial features include boulder fields, ice-walled lake plains and kettle ponds. The landscape within the corridor changes dramatically from one dominated by substantial forested tracts in the north to a patchwork of croplands, woodlots, open grasslands and wetlands in the south. Depending on the route, the Marathon County portion of completed Ice Age NST would

be 40-45 miles. Today approximately 16.5 miles of trail exist in the county between the Village of Hatley and the Plover River State Fishery Area. The actual alignment of the established trail is dependent on the willing cooperation of affected landowners.

The “Preferred” alternative has the potential to link three state fishery areas, a state natural area, two county parks, several town parks, and the Mountain Bay State Trail. It also passes through or near the communities of Hatley, Pike Lake, Galloway, and Three Lakes. Collectively, these areas provide support facilities such as trailheads, parking, water, lodging, and phones. Among the resource features found within the corridor are extensive upland and lowland forest communities, wetlands, ground flora characteristics of both northern and southern Wisconsin, and unique riparian communities associated with the Wolf, Plover, and Eau Claire Rivers. Well-placed overlooks could potentially provide the public with scenic views of the glacial landscape.

A “No Action” alternative has been identified. Also, one other alternative was “Considered but Eliminated.” This alternative has limitations due to exurban development, and wetlands and high water table which lead to undesirable hiking. A number of possible trail route options within the corridor were also identified and evaluated and can be found in Appendix A.

The 1983 *Comprehensive Plan for Management and Use of the Ice Age NST* states that the trail is primarily intended to be a hiking trail. This management approach helps ensure that it provides a high quality walking/hiking experience. It also reflects a high level of consideration for private landowners who allow the trail to cross their property or who live near the trail, who are generally more willing to accept a hiking trail than a trail with activities that have more impact on the land or are more intrusive in terms of sight and sound. Other compatible recreational activities such as birdwatching and snowshoeing are encouraged. In addition, the trail may accommodate cross-country skiing on ungroomed segments that are designed and constructed for this use. Development of a low impact trail using careful design and construction techniques will result in no significant impacts to natural, cultural, social, and economic resources

Developing and managing the Ice Age NST through Marathon County may produce minor negative impacts. Negative impacts on the human environment are generally limited to a perceived increase in nuisance level. Experience has shown that these concerns do not materialize after the trail is constructed. As a group, hikers tend to be environmentally conscious and responsible, and typically do not trespass or litter. At public open house meetings, concerns were expressed about interference with hunting, and the potential health and safety issues of routing a trail near areas of intensive agricultural activity.

Positive benefits for trail users and neighboring landowners would include recreation and fitness opportunities. Other benefits may include aesthetic beauty, open space, natural resource protection, and higher property resale values. Local communities may also experience bolstered economies and increased local pride.

Written comments on this Trailway Plan and Environmental Assessment will be accepted by the NPS, for purposes of compliance with Federal requirements, and by the WDNR, for purposes of compliance with State requirements until June 14, 2013. Address your comments to:

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